

On
the condition of the English language at
the close of the 14th century.

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„De même que les naturalistes reconnaissent les catastrophes du globe dans les différentes couches de terre, de rochers et d'argile, de même un esprit analytique parviendrait à distinguer dans la langue d'un peuple les différentes couches de langues étrangères qui constatent les catastrophes des empires.”

No language affords a more striking illustration of what Mr. Nettement has so finely observed and expressed than the English.

The process, which the Anglo-Saxon had undergone, until its transformation into English had been performed; is so strongly impressed, indeed, on all the literary monuments of the earlier periods and on the English language in general, that we may read most important historical facts by means of analytical philological investigations. Our inquiries into the vocabulary of the English would furnish us with the most valuable material to ascertain the conditions and respective political relations of the different tribes, that have contributed to make up the English language. Thus the few Celtic words still current and expressive of natural and local objects would undoubtedly point to a population in the very commencements of civilisation. The comparatively small number of Danish words and their import would

likewise suggest right ideas of the political importance of that race in England; and, at last, the almost exclusive use of Norman words in jurisdiction, legislature, military and ecclesiastical matters points to the Norman conquest and all its attending circumstances with such an amount of certainty, as does not admit of the least doubt.

But a difficulty arises, if we are to ascertain the exact influence of so heterogeneous elements upon the Anglo-Saxon in its grammatical development. The fact that the Anglo-Saxon had undergone most essential grammatical changes during the times of the Norman sway, wants a satisfactory explanation. Before the Norman conquest there were different forms for the three genders, for the four cases, for the singular and plural numbers; nouns, pronouns, adjectives, articles all of them were declinable; the adjective had two forms of inflexion, the definite and the indefinite: the former being employed, when it was preceded by the definite article, the demonstrative or possessive pronouns; the latter in all other cases; verbal inflexions were very numerous. — All these peculiarities of the Anglo-Saxon have, at the close of the 14th century, either disappeared or undergone most essential modifications; of an inflected language Anglo-Saxon had become a comparatively uninflected one. Is it owing to French influence or to any other causes, that the character of the original language had so strongly been altered? This question is not easily to be decided upon, at least some remarks will be necessary in order to judge soundly of so important a point. First it must be borne

in mind, that in spite of the feudal system, by which the Normans endeavoured to secure their dominion in England, in spite of the measures they took accordingly in filling up all civil and ecclesiastical posts by their countrymen the large mass of the people never discontinued to speak their native idiom; they clung to it with all the tenacity of the Teutonic race and all oppressions on the part of the invaders were to no purpose if not to increase the hate of the indigenous population against the tyrants and their language.

Hence we may conceive, that the number of Norman words introduced into Anglo-Saxon during the first centuries of the Norman away was but a very small one and limited to the most current and indispensable notions of political and ecclesiastical life. — A very material change, however, is already to be noticed in the literary monuments of the first half of the 13th century, I mean the loss or the substitution of the Anglo-Saxon terminations a, o, u in substantive nouns by e, which is evidently not to be owed to the concurrence of the Normans, as their influence, upon the whole, had been but a very slight one. Analogous changes have taken place in the German language without the cooperation of foreign disturbing influences, and thus I cannot but think, that in English too they have been effected quite in accordance with the general principles of decay.

In the two subsequent (13th and 14th) centuries, when political events roused a sort of national pride and spirit, when the Anglo-Saxon portion of the population was brought into prominence and their language made

more fashionable, the coalescence of the two contending idioms was no longer to be avoided. French, it is true, still continued to be used as the official language at court and in parliament; it was not till the year 1362, that a statute was issued, according to which pleas should be pleaded, as will as debated and judged in English.

The introduction of the native idiom in schools is to be traced to a still later period, as we are told by John Trevisa, for „John Cornwal, a maystere of gramere, chaungede the lore in gramere scole, and construccoun of Freynsch into English; and Richard Pencryche lurnede that manere techynge of hym, and other men of Pencryche; so that the ger of oure Lord, a thousand thre hondred, foure score and fyve of the secunde kyng Richard after the conquest nyne, in al the gramere scoles of Engeland childern leueth Freynsch and construeth and lurneth an Englysch.” But among the population the transformation of the Anglo-Saxon into English had already taken place, and this fact is embodied in the two greatest literary monuments of the 14th century, I mean Wycliffe’s complete translation of the scriptures, which is supposed to have been completed about the year 1380, and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, written about 1390. — A general sketch of the language at that period may be given in the following lines.

The vocabulary is in a still unsettled state, new words constantly making their appearance, Wycliffe, whose biblical translation is aiming to bring before the popular mind the word of God and the abuses of the Church, is frequently obliged to give interpretations of the words

of new introduction. Thus he writes: singular or by himself, erb or grene corn, interpretid or expownid, imprudent or unwise, temporal that is lasten a lityl time, dif-fame or puplische etc. But it is remarkable, that articles, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, numerals had remained quite exempt from the mixture with French words, and with reference to the other parts of speech, that almost all words indicative of primary objects, arts and sentiments, with which we become acquainted by daily experience, are of homely Anglo-Saxon growth.

The orthography, extremely confused in Anglo-Saxon, exhibits a strongly marked tendency to simplicity; contraction and elision of the ancient terminations of words, constitute no small part of the change which has taken place; French influence appears to have given rise to the hissing sounds of c, g, ch; the peculiar character of A. S. h, which had turned into g, gh, is to be traced to the same source.

The distinction of grammatical gender could no longer be maintained after the loss of the noun terminations and the introduction of so numerous French words; a compromise was effected, by which the masculine and feminine genders were conferred upon animated beings as designations of sex, and the neuter upon objects without sex. The plural number of nouns ended almost regularly in s or es: the genitive singular was formed in the same way. The use of the definite and indefinite forms of the adjective began to become fluctuating. The verb had lost many of its inflected forms and with them the

means of expressing the manifold relations they implied formerly; a more logical arrangement of the words and sentences had been the natural consequence of these losses. The increasing of these verbs, which belong to the strong order of conjugation was put a stop to; some of them and all of new introduction conformed to the common standard of the weak conjugation.

In how far all these last mentioned changes are owing to French influence, is still a matter of uncertainty; but most of them bear strong marks of their origin and since analogous facts are not to be referred to in other akin languages, we may acquiesce in the conclusion, that they have in one or other way been effected by French influence and not by the indigenous power of the Anglo-Saxon.

Orthography.

a is liable to some variations; it verges to *e*, if arising from A. S. *ae*, as:

whanne whenne, thanne then, lasse lesse, spac spec, brak brek etc., where modern usage has settled on *e* as when, then, less; or *o*, as spoke, broke etc.

m and **n** have a tendency to alter the character of a preceding, if it arises from A. S. *â*; thus the following words are used interchangeably: land lond, hand hond, strand strond, sprang sprong, lamb lomb etc.

u is almost regularly inserted in words of Norman origin to denote the nasal sound of *a* before *n* or *m*, as: commaundement, evaungelist, servaunt, aungels, countenance, chaumbre, aumble.

Romance *a* if followed by any other consonant did not undergo any change, as: space, grace, pale, cas etc.; sometimes the vowel is doubled in order to mark its length, as: paas (i. e. pace), caas (i. e. case), paast etc.; but also in words of Anglo-Saxon origin, as: maad (made), saat (sat) etc.

a (A. S. *ea* before *l*, *r*, *h*) and frequently, if occurring in short syllables, is identical with modern *a*, as: alle, halle, calf, arm — that, am etc.

e is likewise liable to frequent variations; as:

togedere togidere, self silf, besy bisy busy, bretheren britheren, geve gyve; particularly in the unaccented final syllables, as: geder gedir, under undir, whider whidir, yvel yvil etc.

In some words it verges to o as: werd word, swerd sword.

e (A. S. e) is identical with modern e, as: every, ever, bed, ende, hem etc.

e (A. S. aê) is now in most cases represented by ee, as: speche (speech), dede (deed), strete (street), or by ea, as: mele (meal), drede (dread) etc.

e (A. S. ea) has been changed into ea, as: deed (dead), deaf (deaf), heed (head), deeth (death) — or ie as: beleve (believe), or ee as: nedith (needs) etc.

e (A. S. eo) has turned into a, as: fer (far), ferre (farther), derk (dark), sterre (star), werre (war), sterre (starre); or ea: herte (heart), erthe (earth), breed (bread), clefe (cleave) etc.; or ie: freend (friend), feend (fiend) etc.; or ee: depe (deep).

In some words e has turned into u, as: renne (run), berne brenne (burn), berste (burst).

In some words of Romance origin modern usage has established o, instead of e, as: prefe prewe (proof), appreve (approve), meve (move), and in a few A. S. words, as: womanhede (womanhood), nese (nose), — ie instead of e, as: biere (bier), perce (pierce) etc.

i, y are entirely confounded, as: thin thyne, min myn, white whyt etc.; modern E. has in most cases settled

on i, as: wise wyse (wise), idel ydel (idle), his hys (his), mine, thine etc.

Fluctuations between y and u (o) are to be noticed in myche muche mochel (much), hirie byrie burie (bury), fyl ful (full), bisy busy (busy), fyr fuyr fur (fire), tristing trusting (trusting).

y related to A. S. ge and used as a verbal prefix has been lost in modern English, as: i-maad (made) y-ground (ground) etc.

ie, ye (u) is frequently to be met with in the final syllables, where we now find y, as: glorie (glory), hevie (heavy), necessarie (necessary), vilanye, hasardrye, Jewerie etc.

o if arising from A. S. ô is often doubled, as: sho schoo, boke book, blode blood, gode good, moder mooder etc.; the same takes place if it arises from A. S. â, as: on oon one, none noon, bon boon, stone stoon, clothe clooth, drove droof, smote smoot.

o (A. S. eo) has been preserved in modern English, as: worche worke, world, worthe etc.

o (A. S. o) has turned into oa, as: ook (oak), ooth (oath), throte (throat), loof loves (loaf), boord (board), boot (boat) etc.

Fluctuations between o and u are frequently to be noticed, as: thorw thurw (through), sune sone (son), sonne sunne (sun) — cuntree contree, seconde secunde, sudeinly sodenly, cumpanye companie.

The nasal sound of French o is represented by ou, as: generacioun, portioun, prisoun, opinioun, reputacioun etc.

o is followed by u before r final, as: embasitour, honour, hasardour, colour, ryottour, devoure.

u is, in most cases, identical with modern u, as: up, but, cuppe, us, such, thus.

In some words modern usage has changed it into ou, as: thurg (through), schuld (should), cude cuthe (could) etc.

It is now required after the letter g, to mark its hard sound, where as it was regularly omitted at the time of Chaucer, as: begiled (beguiled), gyde (guide), gilty (guilty), gesse (guess), tunge (tongue), synagoge (synagogue) etc.

ai ay ei ey are used indiscriminately: thei thai they thay (they), wei way wey (way), pray preie prey (pray), maiden mayden (maiden).

In the final syllables of words of French origin the vowel e is frequently substituted, as: counsail conseil counsel (counsel), bateil batel (battle), marveil marvel (marvellous).

i or y occurs sometimes instead of ey or ei, as: ueygh nygh, heye hye hygh, deye dye (die) etc.

au occurs for the most part in words of French origin interchangeably with al, as: alter aulter auter (altar), defaute defaulte (fault), paunes (palms), maugre malgre etc.

ew eu (A. S. eow) is often identical with modern ew, as: newe, fewe, knew, threw, schrewd etc.

w has been changed into ue, as: sewe sue (sue), rewe (rue), hewe (hue) etc.; or ow, as: widewe widowe (widow), rew (row), schewe (show) etc.

ou ow are used quite indiscriminately: doun down, hous hows, you yow, loude lowde, Poul Powel, touch towchidé,

Modern **ow** in final syllables is frequently represented by **we**, as: morwe (morrow), borwe (borrow), folwe (follow), narwe (narrow), pilwé pillow), yelwe (yellow), swolwe (swallow), medwe (meadow).

ou has turned into **au** in some words, as: doughter (daughter), loughter (laughter), sloughter (slaughter)

oi oy are of no frequent occurrence: they are mostly to be met with in words of Norman origin, as: voice, voyce, anoint anoynt etc.

Consonants.

The liquids **l, m, n, r** are liable to be doubled, if followed by **e** final, as: alle halle, batelle (battle), cattelle (cattle), summe sum (some), whanne whan (when), thanne then (then), thennes (thence), whennes etc.

p is inserted between **m** and **n**, as: dampne (damn), solempne (solemn), benempt (deprived), ympne (hymn) etc.

A metathesis of the **r** in modern English is to be noticed in the words: briddis (birds), thridde (third), thritty (thirty), brenne (burn), and more frequently in final syllables, as: offre (offer), suffre (suffer), entre (enter), togedre (together), sistris (sisters), modris (mothers) etc.

The labial letters b, p, f, v, ph do not exhibit any important deviations from modern usage.

f and v are used interchangeably, though v seems to have been preferred, if followed by e, as: clefe (cleave), staf staves (stavis), relyf relyves (the remainder), thefe thef (thief).

f often occurs instead of the classical ph, as: fantum (phantom), frenetic (phrenetic), blasfemiden blasphemiden (Wycl.), profet prophet etc.

The dental letters are d, t, th, s, z, sh, sch.

d has sometimes been changed into t, especially in the past participle of the weak conjugation, as: defendit (defended), descendit, engendrit etc.

d is liable to be doubled after short vowels, as: schedd, bledd etc.

th arising from A. S. is used interchangeably with d (seldom t), as: wheder whether, cude, cuthe, quod quoth, lowthe lowde, togeder together, sabothis sabotis (Wycl.)

Greek θ had frequently been represented by t, as: antym (anthem), apotecary (apothecary), troone (throne) etc.

Words of Romance origin end more frequently in, „cion” than, „tion”, as: tribulacioun, informacioun, tradicioun, exaltacioun, resurecioun etc.

s, if final in a word, is often used instead of modern ce, as: pees (peace), pens (pence), whens (whence), flees (fleece), vois (voice), chois (choice), sapiens (sapience) and others.

sch, ssh and ssch represent modern sh, as: sche. schede, flessch fleissh, waisschun (Wycl.)

The guttural consonants are c, k, ch, h, g, z, gh, w.

k preceded by a short vowel corresponds to modern ck, as: blak (black), syk (sick) etc.

k and ch are often used indistinctly, as: worche worke (work), wreche wreke (wreak) etc.

ch, cch have, in modern English, turned into tch, as: pacche (patch), cacche (catch), fecche (fetch), wrecche (wretch), strecche (stretch) — or into dg, as: knowleche (knowledge), grucche (grudge).

h in words of French origin has frequently been omitted, as: our (hour), ympne (hymn), ypocrite (hypocrite),

g, at the time of Chaucer, seems to have been in a period of transition; if beginning a word, it was often represented by the new character g, which had a strong tendency to y, as: yave gave (gave), get yet (yet), gong (young), gouth (youth), ge (ye).

After vowels it has been softened into i, y as yge eyen (eyes), thei syze or seien (saw) etc.

w seems to have been nearly related to g, gh A. S. h, if final in a syllable, as: ynough ynow (enough), oghne owne, drow drough, lowg lough (laughed). —

Grammatical observations.

Substantives.

Grammatical gender had been abandoned with the loss of grammatical inflections; but there was still some uncertainty with reference to animated but unconscious creatures.

Chancer writes: „Tak any bird and put him in a cage and foster it tenderly with mete and drink and kepe it all so kindly as thou may-although his cage of gold be never so gay, yit has this bird lever to be in forest gone etc.”

Inflections were limited to the genitive singular and to the plural number.

The genitive case ended in ys, us, is, es or s: mannus sone, maunis sone (Wycl.), manny soul, Goddus name, which womanis doughter, in reverence of Cristes moder, as it was dayes light (Ch.) etc.

In feminine nouns the genitive case is sometimes denoted by the vowel „e”. Chancer has heorte blood (heart's blood); widewe sone (widow's son); the Prioress Tale (the Tale of the Prioress). This rule is well illustrated in the modern terms Lords day and Lady day etc.

The plural number was formed by addition of s or es, is, as: thingis, comaundementis, tenauntis, aungels, hevenes, places etc.

Nouns ending in f or fe, frequently soften the f into v, as: staf — staves, thef(e) — theves, lyf — lives, leef — leeves, loof — looves, wyf — wyves etc.

Some nouns form their plural in *n* or *en*, as: childe — children (childer W.), eye — eyen, brother — brethren, ox — oxen and others.

both forms in *s* and *n* (*en*) are to be found in: bee — been bees; flee — fleen flees; foo — foon foos; schoo — schoon schoos.

A change of the radical vowel has place in: foot — feet (*fete*), tooth — teeth (*tethe*), cow — kine, man — men, womman — wymmen, goose — gees and others.

dees (*dice*) and pens (*pence*) are regular plural forms.

Uninflected, though not always, are: scheep, folk, yer, horse, manere and some others.

Adjectives.

Strong marks of the Anglo-Saxon definite and indefinite form are still extant. Chancer writes: „Your *grete* goodnes, for youre *grete* profyt — by cause of the *grete* colde, by the *grete* nombre of peple, by resoun of the *grete* mercy, that your *goode* name may be kept etc. „to gete him a *good* name, a *good* felowe, ful of *gret* sentence, in *gret* estate.

But the inflection is far from being exclusively used in accordance with the Anglo-Saxon custom; it is omitted after the definite article, as: „by debaat and discord the *gret* richesces fallen doun” — „which is the *good* way”; and after possessive pronouns, as: hir wys informaciouns, by his *gret* avarice.

It occurs without any reason in the following instance: „for *grete* poverte constreigneth a man to doon many yvels.”

It occurs, moreover, with a remarkable consistency in the cases, where it refers to a noun in the plural number, as:

„I grante yow, that richesses been *goode* to hem, that gete hem well.”

„And Tullius sayth: that *grete* things ben not ay accomplished by strenthe.

„penitence of *goode* men and humble folk — and in the vocative case, as:

„*goode* maistir (Wycl.), o stronge god (Ch.)”

The entire abandonment of the inflection is undoubtedly own to the discrepancies brought forward in the foregoing instances.

The Comparative and Superlative of adjectives are regularly formed by adding *er*, *ere* and *est*, *este* to the indefinite form; long vowels are shortened and the following consonants frequently doubled, as:

„for the richere that he is, the gretter dispenses most he make.”

„wofuller, swete swetter swettest — depe depper deppest etc.”

Some adjectives undergo a vowel change in forming the comparative and superlative, as:

old	elder	eldest
long	lenger	longest
strong	strenger	strengest

The following adjectives are irregularly compared:

bad	were	werst
good	better (betere)	best

lityl (little)	lasse lesse	lest
myche (mochel)	mo	most

The comparatives ferre, nere (fer, ner) are contracted forms.

Numerals.

o, oon	the fyrste ferste
twey tuo two	the other, tother, secunde
thre etc.	thridde etc.
thritty (thirty).	

Pronouns.

The Personal pronouns are:

Nom. I	Gen. min (e)	D. Acc. me
- thou	- thin (e)	- the (thee)
- he	- his hys	- him
- sche	- hire her	- hire hir
- it	- his	- it
- we	- our (e)	- us
- ye ge	- your (e)	- you yow gou
- they thay	- her	- hem

Possessive pronouns.

The possessive pronouns are identical in form with the genitive cases of the personal pronouns. They are sometimes behind their substantives, as:

„Brother myn”, Arcyte cosyn myn etc.

They occur, moreover, in an absolute manner with and without s, as:

„This gold is nought oures.” (Ch.)

„Hom to myn hous, or ellis unto youres.” (Ch.)

„He was, pardy, an old felaw of youres.”

„I wol be your in all that ever I may” etc.

Reciprocal pronouns.

They are identical in form with the accusative cases of the personal pronouns.

„And to his bed he went him hastily.”

„He sette him doun agayn.”

„He is went into the felde him to play.”

„Who so wel remembrith him of these tydings.”

„He warmyde him” etc.

Very seldom a compound form of the personal pronouns is to be met with in the reflective sense:

„And for as moche as a man may acqyte himself beforne God — therefore should he pray to God give him respit a while.” —

Demonstrative pronouns.

pis (this)	pes pese (these) Pl.
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pat (that)	po pos (those) Pl.
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pilke this ilke	this same
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swiche	such
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you yond	yonder.
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Relative pronouns.

„which” „that” are used indistinctly and refer to all numbers and genders:

„And pei pat wenten before, cryeden, Osanna,
Blessed is he pat comep in pe name of pe Lord. (W.)

„In London was a priest, which was so plesant
and servisable unto the wif. (Ch.)

„You which I have loved specially above alle
women sikerly. (Ch.)

„which” is frequently preceded by „the”:

„for pe whiche resouns.”

„a colt on þe whiche non of men sat yit.” (Wycl.)

„þe whiche heerynge joyeden” etc.

„which” is often followed by „þat”, as:

„Doth some goode deedes, þat þe devil which þat is our enemy, ne finde yow unoccupied”.

„who, whos, whom” as relative pronouns occur but in few instances;

„For the wives love of Bathe, whose lif and al hire seste God maintene”. (Ch.)

„Fraunceis Petrark highte this clerk, whos rethorike swete enlumined all Itaille of poetrie.” (Ch.)

„I know not the man whom ye sayn.” (Wycl.)

Interrogative pronouns.

who G. whos(e) D. & Acc. whom

what (whiche before substantives).

„whiche a” occur instead of modern what a, as:

„whiche a gift of God had he for alle his wives.” (Ch.)

„herkeneth which a miracle there befell anon.”

Indefinite pronouns.

Some of them are declinable as in modern English; but the plural ended in e, not in s.

all: „Thei broughten to him alle hauninge yvel”
he wente before alle men.

other: „Away she bod all othere go.”

„And thei goynge toolden to othere.”

„Let ech of us bycome otheres brother.”

„And ech of hem at otheres syune lough.” (Ch.)

„much” denotes sometimes number and degree, as:

„These old folk con mochel thing, quod she” (Ch.)

6586.

„Ye han said mochel thing right well, I say.” 6855.

„But he ne left nought to visite

The ferrest in his parish, moche and lite.” (Ch.)

„any” with the usual meaning „one of many” denotes sometimes „one of two”, as:

„And if that any of us have more than other

Let him be true and part it with his brother.”

„every” is absolutely used, as:

„Everich in otheres hand his trouth laith.” 6986.

„That every schuld an hundred knightes bryng.”

„Everich of these riotoures.”

Articles.

The definite article „pe” (the) coalesces in frequent cases with its substantive, if beginning with a vowel, as:

„thassent, thapostle, thabbot.”

„to theffect and thentent.” (Ch.)

„atte”, at the, as: „atte hasard” etc. (Ch.)

„that” occurs sometimes instead of the def. article, as:

„Nay sayde pat oper hasardour anoon.”

„Thou spok right now of pat traitour Deth.”

„Tel wher he is, or elles pou shalt dye

By God and by pat holy sacrament.” (Ch.)

The indefinite article „a” becomes „an” before words beginning with a vowel or h.

Verbs.

The Anglo-Saxon had two orders of verbs viz. the weak and the strong. The weak order formed its imperfect by adding ode (ede) de (te) to the root, the participle past by adding od (ed) d (t); in the strong order

the imperfect changed its vowel; the participle past ended in en. — Early English exhibits the same distinction with reference to the verbs of Anglo-Saxon origin; those of French parentage mostly belong to the weak order of conjugation.

Verbs ending in de or te with a vowel preceding reject the connecting vowel e or i and form the preterit by adding de (te); the participle past keeps the short vowel of the preterit, but does not double the following consonant as:

brede	bredde	bred (d)
drede	dredde	dred
fede	fedde	fed
grete	grette	gret
hete	hette	het
hide	hidde (hudde)	hid (hud)
lede	ledde	led
lete	lette	let
mete	mette	met
rede	redde (radde)	red (rad)
schede	schedde	sched
spede	spedde	sped
sprede	spredde (spradde)	spred (sprad)
swete	swette	swet
tide	tidde	tid (de) Ch.
flee	fledde	fled

Verbs ending in ay and ey reject the connecting vowel as:

deie (deye)	deyde (dide)	died
lay	layde (leide)	layd
pay	paide	payd

pray	prayde	prayd
say	saide (seide)	said etc.
In make	made	made (maad)
clothe	cladde	clad
have	had (de)	had

the consonants k, th, v* have been rejected.

The vowel change in:

selle	solde	sold
telle	tolde	told

is to be explained by the A. S. forms tealde, sealde etc.

A contraction takes place in the preterit as well as in the past participle, if the verbs end in le, me, ne, re, pe, ve, with a vowel preceding, or in de or te after a consonant, as:

cleve	clefte	(cloven)
crepe	crepte	(cropsen)
dele	delte	delt
deme	demte	demt
dype	dipte	dipt
fele	felde	felt
knele	knelte	knelt
kepe	kepte	kept
lepe	lepte	lept
lene	lente	lent
leve	lefte (lafte)	left (laft)
lese	loste	lorn (lost)?
mene	mente	ment
reve	refte (rafte)	reft (raft)
slepe	slepte	slept
swepe	swepte	swept
wepe	wepete	wept etc.
caste	caste	cast

cutte	cutte (kitte)	cut (kit)
gelde	gelte	gelt
girde	girte	girt
hende	hente	hent
highte	highte	hight
plihht	plighte	plight
putte	putte (puttide W.)	put
rende	rente	rent
sende	sente	sent
sette	sette	set
shende	shente	shent
shette (shut)	shette	shet
spende	spente	spent
wende	wente	went etc.

Verbs ending in guttural consonants have the vowel changed into ou (au), and the consonant into g (gh), as:

abegge	abougte	abought
brynge	brougte	brought
biseche	bisougte	bisought
bye	bougte	bought
cacche	caugte	caught
lacche	laugte	laught
recche	raugte	raught
seke	sougte	sought
strecche	straugte	strought
teche	taugte	taught
werche (worke)	wrougte	wrought.

g and ch had grown vocal in the following instances:

drenche	dreinte	dreint
menge	meinte	meint
quenche	queinte	queint
sprenge	spreinte	spreint etc.

The verbs which belong to the strong order of conjugation may be divided into two classes.

I. Verbs which undergo a change of vowel in the preterit, as:

byginne	began (begunnen)	begonnen (Ch.)
bynde	bond (bounden)	bounden
climbe	clamb (clomben)	y-clomb
delve	dalf (dolven)	dolven
drinke	drank (dronken)	dronken
fynde	fond (founden)	y-found
grynde	grond (grounden)	y-ground
helpe	halp (holpen)	holpen
kerve	karf (korven)	korven
sinke	sank (sunken)	sunken
springe	sprong (sprungen)	sprongen
stele	stale (stoled)	stolen
swimme	swam (swommen)	swommen
swelle	swal (swollen)	swollen
winne	wan (wonnen)	wonnen
smyte	smote (smyten)	smyten etc.

II. Verbs which undergo no change of vowel in the preterit, as:

hede	bade badde	bedun
breke	brak brek	broken
ete	eet	eten
sitte	sat (saat)	seten
speke	spac spec	spoken
trede	trade	troden
weve	wave	woven.
forsoke	forsook	forsoken
grave	grofe	graven

shake	shook	shoken
shape	shope	shapen
shave	shofe	shaven
stande	stood	stonden
take	took (tok)	taken
waisshe	wosshe	waisshun
wexe	woke	woxen.
bite	bote boot	bitten
abide	abode	abidden
ride	rood rode	ridden
rise	roos rose	risen
strike	stroke	striken
write	wroot	writen.
chese	chees ches	chosen
flete	flete	floten
fleghe	fleigh	flowen
frege	frees	froren
heve	haf (hefe)	hoven
lese	lees	lorn.
bete	bete	beten
drawe	drog drowg	drawe(n)
falle	fell	fallen
fonge	feng	fongen
holde	heeld (held)	held holden
grow	grew	grown
honge	heng	hongen
hewe	hew	hewen
knowe	knew	known
move	mew	mown
sowe	sew	sown.

bere	bar (baar)	borun
swere	swore (oo)	sworn
schere	shore	shoren
tere	tar (tore)	torn.

Remarks:

In the third person sing. ind. of verbs ending in t or d, t ist often used instead of the regular termination teth, deth, as:

sent	instead of	sendeth
stont	-	stondeth
let	-	ledeth
went	-	wendeth etc.

The imperative mood ends in „e” in the singular, in „eth” in the plural or „e”, if followed by the personal pronoun.

The infinitive is preceded by „to” and „for to” indiscriminately; in frequent instances the preposition is not to be found at all. As:

„If you liketh *for to* hiere,
if that you luste *to* hiere”.

„Moreover man *oughte to* sorwe for his wikked wordes
as well as his wikked deedes”.

„For which him *oughte to* pleigne”.

„Certes youre wyf oweth rather *be* praised than y-
blamed”.

„Ther gan our host *for to* jape and play”.

„Than gan our host *to* laughe wonderlouthes”.

„The fourthe poynt that *oughte* make a man have
contricioun”.

„For with no venime deigned him *to* die”. Ch.

„To no man deigned hire *for to* be bonde”.

The participle pres. ends in *yng* (Wycl.) and *ing* (Ch.); the past participle has frequently the prefix *y* (i) (Ch.), less frequently in Wycliff's translation; the participle ending *en*, *n* is often wanting.

Anomalous verbs.

1. to be. — I am, thou art ert, he sche is it; pl. we ben, ye ben, they ben. Pret. I was etc.; pl. we weren etc. Part. ben. Imp. be.
2. I schal, thou schal(t), he schal; pl. we schulen etc. Pret. I schulde, scholde; pl. we schulden etc.
3. I wot (woot), thou wost, he wot; pl. we witen, ye witen etc. Pret. I wiste etc.
4. I woll (wul), thou wolt etc.; pl. we willen Pret. I wolde etc.
5. I may, thou maist, he may; pl. we mowen (moun) etc. Pret. I mighte etc.
6. I can (con), thou const (canst) etc.; pl. we cunnen (connen) etc. Pret. I coude, cuthe etc.
7. I do, thou dost etc. Pret. I dide, dede etc.
8. I mot, thou most, he mot; pl. we moten etc. Pret. I moste, muste etc.
9. I go; pl. we gon etc. Prét. I yede; pl. I gone.

Adverbs.

They differ with respect to their forms from modern usage. Prefixes are frequently employed to the formation of adverbs, as:

anight, abacke, adoun, ager etc.

Adjectives are often changed into adverbs by addition of *e final*, as:

„soothe, longe, rihte” etc.

the loss of this final e affords a satisfactory explanation of the modern use of adjectives as adverbs.

Terminations of frequent occurrency are still

es: elles (else), nedes (nuds), ones (once), twies (twice), thries (thrice), algates, certes, hennes (hence), thennes (thence) etc.

der: hider (hither), whider, thider etc.

en: abouten, beforen, withouten.

The use of the negative adverbs requires still some observations:

„ne”, „no”, „not”, „nought”

were indiscriminately employed in negative sentences.

„No nightingale *ne* couthe singe
so wonder merily and wel”.

„Dooth some goode deedes, that the devel which
that is oure enemy *ne* fynde yow unoccupied”.

„That ye *ne* rette it *not* my vilanye”.

„I *ne* saugh this yer so mery a company”.

„He is not povere that hath goode frendes and
Tullius sayth, that grete things ben *not* ay accom-
plised by strength”.

„His synne shal *not* torne him to delit”.

„He ne was *nought* gay”.

Frequently a coalescence took place of the negative with the verb if beginning with a vowel, w or h, as:

nis (is not), *nas* (was not), *nyle* (will not), *nolde* (would not) etc.

Prepositions.

„In” has often the sense of „upon, on”. as:

„While that the corps lay *in* the flore upright”.

„And *in* an hill how wretchedly he died”.

„He starf ful wretchedly *in* a mountain”.

- „On” has sometimes the signification of „in”:
 „On live” i. e. in live, a live.
 „What is a farthing worth parted *on* twelve” Ch.
 „With” is used instead of „by”, as:
 „Was with the leon frette” i. e. he was devoured
 by the lion etc.
 „Within” appears often separated into its constituent
 parts with altered position, as:
 „in with hire bosom”,
 „in with his thought” etc.
 „Again” is used in the sense of „towards”, as:
 „And praide hem for to riden again the quene”.
 „He rode him againe”.
 „By” has sometimes the meaning of „in”, as:
 „by the morwe = in the morning”.
 „Anentis” (anemptis) occurs in Wycliffe and means
 „before”, as:
 „anentis men it impossible, but not anemptis
 God”.

Conjunctions.

Most of them are followed by „that”, corresponding to the French „que”:

- „Wil *that* iron is hoot, men sholden smyte”,
 „by cause *that* there ben thre maner of defautes”.
 „But though *that* Salomon spoke such a word”.
 „Al be it that he wist himself” etc.
 „For all be it so *that* alle tarynge is anoyful, it is
 no reproof” etc.

The disjunctive conjunction „ne” is where modern usage has established „nor”, as:

„Neither after his deth *ne* in his lif”.

„Noon honour *ne* reverence”.

„There nas ballif *ne* herde *ne* other hyne”.

„For neither God *ne* no creature shal be frend
to hem”.

